

# **AIRMARKINGS**

FIRST BOOK OF ODES

POEMS

**STEVEN FRATTALI**

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**of**

TAIPEI

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Find me here my hands

rain falling

What do I have the

seed  
processes of earth  
now opening

so that changing

in darkness

leaf and leaf flower green rain

What do I have I take

And cover it

black dirt

powers

---

After the rain  
rain still

white mist  
still air droplets

leaf and damp ground

close earth open

black with rain  
mist soaks

deepest

sweet scent  
of green

---

Here  
and there on  
the surface world  
leaves fallen trees bare

Fields  
at evening  
gathered  
burnt

cold grass night's silence  
footprints in the dirt  
shadows reaching life not yet

---

Spirit  
streams into roots  
of  
branch stem leaf of  
light air  
powers powers  
burning  
earth leaves  
autumn  
fire with all  
rain  
again

---

Sun branches

rustle in breeze

I sit watch

day is silent

feel

warmth on skin

blue sky

no rain

---



Moving shifting light  
blades

of the palm tree

in thought almost  
the shade

enigma

---

Dream grove of palm shade

the sun

glare  
quiet light green

apparition

closed eyes being

the unseen blue

---

April grass the night  
scent the chill

stir  
memory

ash

wind  
clear sky

who?  
unknown stars

opening closing

---

You ask  
the path

when summer sun vines bees loud

in the air

when where you say

then touch stem petal

touch  
the flower's scent

---

October burning

flaking the sunlit tree

Blue

and light

desolate

falling leaf

ripeness and

the silent noon

---

White blossoms

come out   day's light

noon

flowered

O sun

inhabiting   light

together

for so long

---

Form radiant

gold

impalpable

Time mind questioning

less than water

not even thought

Where is light

is clarity being

---

The rain still

still air-water

bright light drops

mist rain

falling or not

earthen-air leaf-wet

sponge-world

the earth

in its very being

wet

---

Breathe her name

January air how much

Cold breath icy

perfume

aspiration

stream of air

moving

quickly past

fire

her glance

moment freezes burns

brief electric pain

black silk

ecstatic night

cold dark

---

Silences   echoing

into failing light

yellow green

sunset   blazing gold

yet silent

---

Open  
burning light

speaks

kindling

searches       itself

moves   leaves

now dried

---



Sun rim  
twilight

wind maple tree  
of night

stars are teeming

---

At night snow falls silent

branches of the

plum so white

heavy flakes

no more sidewalks  
now

And yet the earth

shows small prints

---

Filaments roots

finding

searching and  
finding

ground

night sun

deep well

---

Smoke of autumn fires  
burnt evening air  
drifting  
smoke  
green sky of noble blue  
and the first stars  
road like ash  
earth is still burning  
at horizon's edge

---

You and I    follow  
             these shadows

branches

of dogwood    the juniper  
             and honeysuckle  
all

The dark involvements    flower

one gives one's being    wholly

the change  
             final

and the uncrossable shade

---

Star-drift  
in deep grass

sleep

world of light

perfect realm

many and many

many realms

never comprehend

---

This porch window and the night

cool air the scent

of flowers grass

very faint

one instant gone

dispersed through the dark

time-smoke

stars

the leaves

---

Fallen sun   dark                    hills

ember light

star-sparks   blown

burning paper of earth

spread open to the night

---

Trees

book of burnt matches

yellow light  
is green

field path

hard frozen

breath smoke   face   ears cold

detail of star  
needlepoint

then

Headlights   the dark road

---



Autumn fires gone earth

bare

trees are

are not

fields are

are not

black sky

clouds of stars

deep

on and on

The wind

so cold walking

---

Woven tunnel through night trees

branches

weave of shadows

a bright breeze leaves flurrying

the sidewalk's light veins

with shadow splotches bend

shadow-hands pulling the tree's hair

---

Dirt in my hand  
seeds  
held to  
Light  
roots and not yet flowers  
But growth  
is hidden near  
silent exclaiming light  
Flowers  
hold  
sun earth

---

Stem by stem and leaf

light network

August sun   burning  
                  embracing

all and

each   made part

silent heat whisper   clamor of noon

---

Blue evening  
orchards gardens  
ancient rows  
of hills  
smoke  
streaming  
of burning leaves  
footsteps  
the low wall of stones  
fallen leaves  
the late sun

---

Tall vines

dripping rain  
this morning

breathes

water air and light  
mist

Hear the  
water

leaf  
tapping sound

breathe

scent of earth dampness

feel  
powers

---

Furnace

setting sun

black phone poles and

far off

bristly

char of hills

red light

gold sand bar clouds

darker air indigo

no wind

---

Sun-leaves  
glow on the dirt floor

spots of light  
veins  
in the wind  
of twilight green sun  
light  
web of leaves veins air  
light

cracks bright dust motes

as though stirred spinning fast  
currents hurrying  
somewhere

---



Midsummer grass light green

pale hot sun

white sky

grass waving hay yellow

scorched light brown currents of wind

---

Leaf green white-  
blooming  
pea

silent being time

sleep moves

deep water  
Light

Time the climate where

spring blossoms

in the process

in that stillness

---

The leaf

deeper than water

light

burns green    grows a sun

hole

with    trees

branches

blossoms and

lives

---

Ten miles

afternoon sunlight

Road

gravel dust glitter

glories of sky

yellow field yellow field

white road on so far

so hot and no breeze

---

What summer

of sunlight what day

we live move

Light the hand

shade and warm currents

What  
thought

bright thought let go

---

Noon

so bright  
the field

Stirs

waves

yellow grass

rippling

the hottest

hour

presences

And the air is filled

Light

deepening everywhere

---

Light

desire

dreamed woman

so endless

weightless a moment

no longer

---

Sun

air quiet

still day

Bees

constant

hum

Light

felt warmth

noon heat

sit here

want just this

quiet

light warmth on skin

day life

present not yet gone

---



Shadows of leaves

sun wind

grass

close to ground touch

grass

serrated shadows

phalanx shadows

soil breathes

earth pale anemic

grass stems

each stem

and the eye

is closed here

---

Pole beans  
twine

leaves stretch and reach wide

spreading sun-river

veins of light  
water green river

curling tendrils wrapping

woman green woman

burns autumn leaves

discards wastes

grief

breath smoke of  
leaves the cold air

white veins of a leaf  
in the frozen puddle

---

Eyes closed asleep or not

my watching who is here

feel the night's

rain now where is

that

but who really

trees flowing tearing leaves

saying take this and

this take more

to the wind

Questioning me

with your thought

your feelings

silent far beneath

---

Evening sun    latticework  
                  leaves

                  thick tangled wall

green arbor shade    sunlight  
                          so gold

                  aura    light    day's sun

                  lingering

                          the massed tangle

  darkening

The breeze

                  grapes hang    look like wasp nests

                          very dim brown light

                          then dark

---

Morning sun  
on the

light  
time spring

joy

diamond

wind  
this burning

---

Evening      violet clouds

intermittent wind    black trees  
   agitated

## Why only

the wind    going where

leaves    wind-eaten

choruses massing saying

And yet

the world is quiet

hours    moments

no return

---

Sleep

where who  
blank

blankets warm

sun slats  
sand colored

light ladder

dim room

goodbye

curled toward

inner  
space

remote silent teeming voices

where wind rain seasons

say sun moon

farewell

again

---

The leaf

August sun

tall bean plant

curling

tendrils green vines

white flowers pink flowers

tangling

flutters down

still air and green light

yellow bright

seams of

leaf lily pads

pond water surface light

ripples flaking green yellow

shadows

dim garden floor

and cool

Overhead August sun

---



Stranger

secrets hidden

the evening sun

knows

broken the light-spokes

glancing off amber field  
the hills' gold-green flank

earth is filled

empty

round apple ripe corn parchment sheaf

wheat foams dark brown in last light

bats skimming low

The path leads where

Stranger my eye sees the world

my hand cannot touch it

---

The sun hot air is still

fragrant atmosphere the garden  
basil mint peppers

white and yellow flowers

leaf and

leaf and  
green vines flowers  
many

beans peas tomatoes  
squash with broad deeply creased dark leaves  
(favorite of toads)

a scrap of field mouse so quick  
there gone

midday sun burning silence

blare of light heat whispers

silent stir of growth leaf and  
leaf and stem

papery rustle  
soft cling of heart-shaped green leaf  
on the bright white tee-shirt  
passing down a row  
of pole-climbing beans

---

Hair in flame

Walk blue sky white sky

Then falling burnt-out form

Burnt evening air darker  
cool

the black earth  
fires

grass leaks heavy smoke

the root and vine burnt up

Weightless star-crowded night

voices choir from a hollow stump

---

The night air    this

honeysuckle scent    very faint

almost a thought

the summer night

secret hidden in the dark

the breeze

stirring the jasmine leaf

the roses too    one moment passed

silence    like thought

almost unknown feelings

searching

---

At night

reach in sleep walk touch

leaves flowers

lowest vines

the slow slug too

these realms of water earth

air fire

---

Wind blows

stars

night turns

wide empty

night

snow drift

sand dunes over

fences posts

snow crystal world

dark lost

luminous forgotten earth

---

Sun leaves at noon

not bright not

branches move

glare leaves glare

light points  
burning

visible energy day

no form of light

---

Grass

midnight

stars

the tree

grass touches face

looking up

tree trunk

curving up

night

breeze    dust  
of stars    blue night  
             branches

stars turn    ground  
                 drifts slow

sky-earth

---



The sun baking ground field

humming

bright air points of  
sun

waves of heat  
shimmer

sleep

summer day

roots

in the dark soil

being

---

The tear  
opened up somewhere  
the blood flow  
moth pulsing  
in spider of  
blood's  
web spider web of  
a wound  
pin points  
tangling  
drag net of  
body

---

Day uncut field high grass high sky

midsummer light

the still air

Silence heat afternoon

far air of the field clear to the end

sun warm light

waves move through deep grass

somewhere the sound of water

---

Fire smoke evening

deep blue horizon

rustling dry leaves

burning

drifts of leaves ashes

earth drifts  
falls away

the night opens  
rises

points of darkness  
points  
a map leading elsewhere

---

Green sky twilight

slate colored clouds

ember of late sun

tree branches charcoal

sharp in the brown light

flocks of birds

A wind last light of all

sun-spurts

black rooftops

then none just shapes

space itself

The wind

movements in the sky light

and the clouds

processes

---

Sun low    hill's edge

last light

pearl ice-mist    hill dark    spruces

Cold blue    evening    smoke breath

green sunset    ember burnt trees

sky    stars

valley  
snowfield    gray    gone

river dim    more dim

Where?

---

Footsteps creak in snow  
green sunset deep blue dusk  
blue light of snow silver shining  
the other world

Walking

Wind voices

Dusk eyes the night  
snow voices memories  
gone now never gone

---

Afternoon sleep  
and window shade sun  
sparks through  
bright dust motes  
small funnels glitter  
dust light vortex  
bamboo blinds pale ginger ale light  
beyond  
luminous day  
swelling receding  
paper wall of light shadow stripes  
of line and pulley  
gold sun streaks very hot  
burning depth

---



Snow night

walking blizzard

pearl emulsion around streetlight

snow falls heavier lost mind drifts

falling into sky night

face burnt numb mouth freezes

spread arms hold

white

ground

Stranger

white falls erasing

---

Field   bright snow   valley  
                 river   banks all light  
sun-fields   east west  
         cold   radiant  
aching eye tears  
                 blurs  
         hand shields eyes  
         sky   clear   white blue  
bright frozen river valley sun-mist

---

## Spring

shoots the rain  
falling cool

and sun green and clear  
wind

bean sprouts curve arching out of the dirt  
pale bright  
green carrot stems too

onions scented basil leaf  
holding  
water beads

the pepper plant  
squash yellow flowers broad leaves  
necklace of water drops down middle

and dripping  
down when tipped

tomatoes ragged leaves  
white and pale lilac flowers  
of the pea vines

bees buzz around them in bright sunlight

all afternoon

---

Berries ripe now    black bright

heavy stems branches sag  
swaying in every breeze

drunken man nodding

dark green leaves rustle

the late time now                      heat

cicadas hum

ripeness  
a mystery

---

## AFTERWORD

### Encounters With the Author in Taipei

We first made the author's acquaintance at a well-known restaurant in Taipei, the Wysteria Tea House, famous as having been a meeting place at one time for dissident intellectuals in the years of political struggle in Taiwan .

During the recent effort to publish his rather extensive work, we had various occasions to discuss aspects of his past and current writing.

Your poetry is quite varied in style and in form. Where do you locate yourself in the overall debate concerning poetic form?

I consider myself an eclectic. The main thing for me is to grasp, mentally, a certain object -- that is, an experience, a scene, an event -- to see it and feel it. Any language that seems to convey the reality of that is good, any language which remains merely language, merely words, is for me of no interest, in some cases it is actively negative, in the sense of being obstructive.

A cliché?

Yes or not even a cliché but in a way worse than that. Much of our language obscures the nature of reality. Words in themselves are, in a sense, the enemy of writing. I tell students that all the time. Words most often merely convey the usual accepted social understanding. Writing is for the purpose of grasping reality itself, which is always

something other than the social understanding.

Do you consider yourself a political writer?

All writing is political in the sense of attempting to correct these false social understandings. At times its purpose is to merely reveal with a new freshness, a perceptual freshness, as it were. But even this itself has a certain basic political significance, in the sense that awakened human beings will act and think differently than those who are at rest in the normal tranquilized non-perception that we usually are caught up in.

Does living outside the United States help or hinder your writing?

I think it helps, in general. It is in some ways a very undeveloped culture, yet in other ways it is overbearing. (The US, that is.) There is, for example, a great deal of rather stifling political correctness, as it's called, and to get away from that is itself a positive thing. For a while I had no idea how I would ever get all this material published, especially if you're not there trying to do all the "networking" that is needed, and which I was absolutely terrible at anyway -- worse than terrible, I really had no clue, I still don't, I suppose. And then it came about that you could just do it all by yourself, by means of the internet.

How much material is it? It's quite a lot, it would seem.

Yes, I guess it's about 40 volumes or so. Over 2,000 pages, if you want to measure it like that. I don't know how much it would weigh.

There seem to be many styles represented. Was that something you consciously strove for?

Yes. I always wanted to be able to represent a wide variety of experiences. My first models for the artist were people such as Picasso, Goethe, Bach -- artists who could work in a very wide range of forms and even use widely different styles. Of course, I can't compare myself to people like that, but it was still a goal, to try many types of things.

What sorts of things are you working on currently?

Well as you know I am trying to get all this existing work published, going through it, touching it up here and there, proofreading, and so forth. After that, I think I might return to some translating work -- Holderlin especially, and some Chinese poets, but don't ask me which ones.

All right, but can you say whether they are modern or classical?

Classical. My favorite is Mung Hao-Ren, actually.

There are many other things to talk about, but perhaps you could say something about these pieces.

It is the first of a series of four books, all done with the same technique. I was thinking of Larry Eigner, I suppose, also of Pound, Ammons, May Swenson, and others.

## About the Author

Steven Frattali is an expatriate American writer living in Taipei. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry, totaling over 2,000 pages of work. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism*.

## About the Banyan Press of Taipei

The Banyan Press of Taipei was founded in 2009 by Samuel Palmer and Steven Frattali. It plans to publish the work of expatriate Anglophone writers of the Pacific Rim who are working outside the norms of mainstream publishing. The Press does not at this time invite submissions, but it hopes to do so in the future.



